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WAY THE RING WENT ROUND

Continued from page 5

dened with opportunities to put thoughts into words; so he let them run upon the tints of sunset on the pink chiffon and the flashes of fire on the girl's cheeks, till he wondered if it was all the sunset, or partly the Count. That man was absorbed in rolling a cigarette and listening to the girl, while his smile played surprises with his mustache. As Jack's eyes followed the thought of a rival, the cigarette was on its way up to the waiting lips, a triumph of manufacture.

After that Jack's wits apparently forsook him altogether. Lilian spoke to him, and when he started and asked her to repeat she turned to the Count in disgust. It was so evident that the Eastern education had demoralized his usefulness, in her estimation, that Jack did the best thing he could for himself when he took himself away.

He remembered Lilian saying: "You must come out again sometime and spend an evening." He remembered it because it was odd for her to say. He remembered that the Count said something about seeing him again and that he replied: "Oh, yes, we shall certainly meet." But better, he remembered the dewdrops glistening on his horse's mane and a lot of such irrelevant things. And all the time he was thinking about cheese sandwiches.

At ten o'clock that night Jack lay in bed. The doctor had just left him. He was bandaged and pale. There were lines of pain on his face, but he seemed half tempted to smile. The Chinese boy glided across the rugs with a letter which he had to open, for Jack's available hand was on the wrong side. A messenger waited in the hall for an answer. The smile triumphed as he read:

Jack, dear Jack, I am so horribly, so awfully ashamed! I have just read in the evening paper how you jumped off the train last night after the robbers, and all alone in the dark with those two ruffians, captured one of them and held him all night at the point of his own pistol, till the morning train stopped for you.

It was just like you, Jack, and the pluckiest thing I ever heard of. How you must despise me! But please come out to-morrow, Jack, the first thing in the morning, just to let me tell you how I hate myself for being so mean to you.

Laboriously, left-handedly, wincing and smiling, Jack scrawled with a pencil:

Can't, Tige. Laid up for repairs. I must take the will for the deed for a day or two. It's all right.

At ten the next morning Jack was lying on a divan in the library. The room was full of odors. The flowers of the "City of Flowers" are not used to having their domain invaded or their conic supremacy disputed; but there was a pungent sense of carbolic and such things about the room. The library was dark. The doctor had ordered sleep. With his eyes wide open, Jack was trying to obey. Only one little wisp of sunlight found a crevice somewhere. It made no effort to light the room—that was too hopelessly much. The yellow wisp simply fell across the rugs, from the window to the door, like a finger, pointing; and Jack's eyes had followed it as the door silently opened. There was a faint rustle of something soft. The wisp of light shot across white and pink. A fragrance obliterated the carbolic. A contrite incarnation of beauty was kneeling by the divan.

"Oh Jack! however did you dare?" she sobbed. "And you hadn't even a revolver!"

It was a curious greeting; but out of the abundance of the heart the lips had to.

"I had a dandy long-stemmed pipe," Jack said. "It worked all right in the dark till I borrowed the other fellow's guns. But, dash it all! it was the wrong fellow. There was no way of telling the two apart in the distance. I was after the ring, you know; but the fellow who dealt with me inside was the one who slipped me."

"Oh, Jack, why didn't you tell me yesterday? If you only had, you might

never have known how mean I can be." "If there'd been no hold-up, Tige, you might never have found out what a coward I can be."

"Jack! What is this?" Her trembling fingers touched the bandages. In the shadows and chagrin she had just noticed them. "Were you wounded and suffering, Jack, all the time I was so mean to you?"

"No, no, Tige. These are only some scratches which I got last night in another set-to after the ring. But I seem fated; for after all it wasn't there when I got there. You see, I was eating cheese sandwiches when they wanted to see our hands, and the fellow who was depleting me spotted the sandwiches and shoved a whole one up under his handkerchief. The only good look I had was at his little finger going up to his mouth. There was a queer crook in it, and yesterday I saw that same little finger going up to the mouth with a cigarette; and by Jove! it had my ring on it. That was one too many. I called the fellow down last night out by Mission Cliff. Worse luck, I didn't have my pipe, and he managed two shots at me before I got away his pistol. And after all he lighted a match and showed me his hand to prove that the ring wasn't there. I even offered to let him off, pro tem., if he would give it up, but he wouldn't. He—"

"Jack!"

"Well?"

"It was because he couldn't. Here it is. He gave it to me just after you left."

"By Jove! that's the ring. But how the deuce do you know who I—"

"I saw the crooked little finger going up with the cigarette, Jack."

"And he asked you to marry him, and—" Jack was trying to rise. The reminder was sharp. He cringed, and to cover it muttered: "If you told him to wait till he finished his education it'll be a long one, for he's going to San Quentin."

"You're just horrid, Jack! And you have a perfect right to be."

"No, I haven't. It was mean. I didn't think what I was saying."

"Well, I positively refused him, Jack. Truly I did. And when he would not take a no, and insisted on leaving the ring, I told him to go to papa."

"But your papa isn't dead, Tige."

"You mean thing! Anyway, I knew that Count Zorotti, as he called himself, would wish that he was, before he got away. Papa is too fond of you to fancy even real foreigners."

"Well, that settles it, Tige. The ring has got round to you, all right, in its own stupid way. Now you put it on right away, or I'll go ask papa myself—see?"

"I will not, Jack, for I am not worthy."

"Rodents! Give it to me. I'll put it on with my left hand."

"Oh, Jack, I'm so sorry for you!"

"So am I, dash it! It would be the proper thing for me to hug you. I want to, and I can't."

"I can take the will for the deed, Jack, till you're better. But about the ring, Jack—Oh, I can't! I can't!"

"Can you give me some vague idea about why not?"

"Why, I haven't finished my education, Jack. I haven't learned to differentiate between cowardice and expediency."

RESULT OF EMANCIPATION

THE late Senator Vest used to enjoy telling of the eccentricities of an old Georgia friend who had served in the Confederate forces and who for many years thereafter was an "unreconstructed" of the most pronounced type.

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